FIELD EMISSION DEVICE

This application is a divisional of U.S. Patent Application No. 09/754,275, filed on January 5, 2001 which claims priority from Korean Patent Application No. 00-361, filed on January 5, 2000, in the Korean Intellectual Property Office, the disclosure of which is incorporated herein in its entirety by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a field emission device (FED) which is capable of focusing an electron beam on an anode, and ensures stable operation with high anode voltages, and a method for fabricating the FED.

2. Description of the Related Art

An FED panel with a conventional FED is illustrated in FIG. 1. A cathode 2 is formed over a substrate 1 with a metal such as chromium (Cr), and a resistor layer 3 is formed over the cathode 2 with an amorphous silicon. A gate insulation layer 4 with a well 4a, through which the bottom of the resistor layer 3 is exposed, is formed on the resistor layer 3 with an insulation material such as SiO_2. A micro-tip 5 formed of a metal such as molybdenum (Mo) is located in the well 4a. A gate electrode 6 with a gate 6a aligned with the well 4a is formed on the gate insulation layer 4. An anode 7 is located a predetermined distance above the gate electrode 6. The gate electrode 7 is formed on the inner surface of a faceplate 9 that forms a vacuum cavity in associated with the substrate 1. The faceplate 8 and the substrate 1 are spaced apart from each other by a spacer (not shown), and sealed at the edges. As for color displays, a phosphor screen (not shown) is placed on or near the anode 7.

Since a high-voltage electrical field is created around micro-tips in such FEDs, there is the risk of electrical arcing events. Although the cause of electrical arcing is not clearly identified, discharging caused by a sudden large amount of outgassing seems to cause the electrical arcing. According to an experiment result, such arcing occurs with application of an anode voltage as high as 1kV for both a FED placed within a high-level vacuum chamber without a faceplate, or as a FED vacuum-sealed

with a faceplate, as shown in FIG. 1. According to a result of optical microscopy, damage caused by the arcing is mostly detected at the edges of the gate 6a of the gate electrode 6. This is considered to be caused by a strong electric field created near such sharp edges of the gate 6a. An electrical short occurs between the anode 7 and the gate electrode 76 due to the arcing. As a result, a high-anode voltage is applied to the gate electrode 6, thereby damaging the gate insulation layer 4 below the gate electrode 6, and the resistor layer 3 exposed through the well 4a. This damage becomes serious as the anode voltage level increases.

Therefore, the simple configuration of the conventional FED, in which the cathode and anode are spaced apart from each other by just spacers, is not enough to ensure a reliable FED operable with high voltages. The brightness of FED panel depends on the anode voltage level. Thus, a high-brightness FED cannot be manufactured using the conventional FED. The conventional FED cannot focus an electron beam emitted by the micro-tips on the anode, so that it is difficult to achieve a high-resolution display. In addition, a color display with high-color purity cannot be implemented by such a FED.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

To solve the above problems, it is an object of the present invention to provide a field emission display (FED) which ensures stable operation with high anode voltages, and a method for fabricating the FED.

It is another object of the present invention to provide an FED with high-resolution, and with high-color purity for color displays, and a method for fabricating the FED.

According to an aspect of the present invention, there is provided a field emission device (FED) comprising: a substrate; a cathode formed over the substrate; micro-tips having nano-sized surface features, formed on the cathode; a gate insulation layer with wells each of which a single micro-tip is located in, the gate insulation layer formed over the substrate; a gate electrode with gates aligned with the wells such that each of the micro-tips is exposed through a corresponding gate, the gate electrode formed on the gate insulation layer; a focus gate insulation layer

having openings each of which one or more gates correspond to, the focus gate insulation layer formed on the gate electrode; and a focus gate electrode with focus gates aligned with the openings of the focus gate insulation layer, the focus gate electrode formed on the focus gate insulation layer.

It is preferable that a resistor layer is formed over or beneath the cathode, or a resistor layers is formed over and beneath the cathode in the FED.

According to another aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method for fabricating a field emission device (FED), comprising: forming a cathode, a gate insulation layer with wells, and a gate electrode with gates on a substrate in sequence, and forming micro-tips on the cathode exposed by the wells; forming a focus gate insulation layer on the gate electrode to have a predetermined thickness with a carbonaceous polymer layer, such that the wells having the micro-tips are filled with the carbonaceous polymer layer; forming a focus gate electrode on the focus gate electrode; forming a predetermined photoresist pattern on the focus gate electrode; etching the focus gate electrode into a focus gate electrode pattern using the photoresist pattern as an etch mask; etching the focus gate insulation layer exposed through the focus gate electrode pattern by plasma etching using O_2, or a gas mixture containing O_2 for the focus gate insulation layer and a gate for the micro-tips as a reaction gas, thereby resulting in wells in the gas insulation layer; etching the carbonaceous polymer layer within the wells of the gate insulation layer by plasma etching using O_2, or a gas mixture containing O_2 for the focus gate insulation layer and a gas for the micro-tips as a reaction gas, such that the carbonaceous polymer layer partially remains on the surface of the micro-tips; and etching the surface of the micro-tips by plasma etching using the carbonaceous polymer layer remaining on the micro-tips as an etch mask, and etching the carbonaceous polymer layer itself, using the reaction gas, thereby resulting in micro-tips with nano-sized surface features.

It is preferable that the carbonaceous polymer layer is formed of polyimide or photoresist. The carbonaceous polymer layer may be etched by reactive ion etching (REI). The nano-sized surface features of the micro-tips can be adjusted by varying the etch rates of the carbonaceous polymer layer and the micro-tips. It is preferable

that the etch rates are adjusted by varying the oxygen-to-the gas for the micro-chips in the reaction gas, plasma power, or plasma pressure during the etching processes.

Preferable, the micro-tips are formed of at least one selected from the group molybdenum (Mo), tungsten (W), silicon (Si) and diamond. The reaction gas may be a gas mixture of O_2 and fluorine-based gas, such CF_4/O_2, SF_6/O_2, CHF_3/O_2, $CF_4/SF_6/O_2$, $CF_4/CHF_3/O_2$, or $SF_6/CHF_3/O_2$. Alternatively, the reaction gas may be a gas mixture of O_2 and chlorine-based gas, such Cl_2/O_2, CCl_4/O_2, or $Cl_2/CCl_4/O_2$.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The above objects and advantages of the present invention will become more apparent by describing in detail preferred embodiments thereof with reference to the attached drawings in which:

FIG. 1 is a sectional view of a conventional field emission device (FED);

FIG, 2 is a plan view of a preferred embodiment of an FED according to the present invention;

FIG. 3 is a magnified view of the portion A of FIG. 2;

FIG. 4 is a sectional view taken along line A-A′ of FIG. 3;

FIGS. 5 through 8B are sectional views illustrating the fabrication processes of an FED according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 9 is a scanning electron microscope (SEM) photo showing a section of the FED fabricated by the inventive method;

FIG. 10 is a SEM photo showing the configuration of a micro-tip of the FED of FIG. 9; and

FIG. 11 is a SEM photo showing the configuration of the focus gate electrode of the FED fabricated by the inventive method.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The present invention will now be described more fully with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which preferred embodiments of the invention are shown. Referring to FIG. 2, which is a plan view of a field emission device (FED) according to

the present invention, a cathode 120 and a gate electrode 160 are arranged in a x-y matrix at the center of a substrate 100, and a focus gate electrode 190 that is a feature of the present invention is arranged over the cathode 120 and the gate electrode 160. The cathode 120 and the gate electrode 140 are electrically connected to pads 121 and 161, respectively, arranged on the edges of the substrate 100.

Portion A of FIG. 2 is enlarged in FIG. 3. As shown in FIG. 3, the focus gate electrode 190 has a focus gate 190a through which the cross-overlapped portion of the cathode 130 and the gate electrode 160 is exposed. In particular, the gate electrode 160 with the gate 160a is exposed through the post gate 190a. The focus gate electrode 190 is located such that the cross-overlapped portion of the cathode 120 and the gate electrode 160, i.e., corresponding to a single pixel, is exposed through its focus gate 190a. The distance between the gate electrode 190 and the pads 121 and 161 are determined in the range of 0.1-15 mm, such that the gate electrode 160 and the cathode 120 are fully covered with the focus gate electrode 190. The focus gate electrode 190 is electrically coupled with an external ground, thereby providing electron emission when an arching occurs with a high voltage. As a result, the underlying layers can be protected from damage.

FIG. 4 is a sectional view taken long line A-A′ of FIG. 3. Referring to FIG. 4, a cathode 120 is formed over a substrate 100 with a metal such as chromium (Cr), and a resistor layer 130 is formed over the cathode 120 with an amorphous silicon. A gate insulation layer 140 with a well 140a, through which the bottom of the resistor layer 130 is exposed, is formed on the resistor layer 130 with an insulation material such as SiO_2. Use of the resistor layer 130 is optional. In other words, formation of the resistor layer 130 may be omitted so that the cathode 120 is exposed through the well 140a. A micro-tip 150, which is a feature of the present invention, is formed in the well 140a on the resist layer 130 with a metal such as molybdenum (Mo). A micro-tip 150 is a collection of a large number of nano-tips with nano-size surface features. The micro-tip 150 is formed of Mo, W, Si or diamond, or a combination of these materials.

A gate electrode 160 with a gate 160a aligned with the well 140a is formed on the gate insulation layer 140. A focus gate insulation layer 191 is formed on the gate electrode 160 with polyimide, and the focus gate electrode 190 mentioned above is formed over the focus gate insulation layer 191. The focus gate electrode 191 is formed of Al, Cr, Cr/Mo alloy, Al/Mo alloy, or Al/Cr alloy. The focus gate insulation layer 191 has an opening corresponding to the focus gate 190a of the focus gate electrode 190.

In the FED having the above-mentioned configuration, an appropriate voltage is applied to the focus gate electrode 190, so that electric field around the gate 160a of the gate electrode 160 becomes weak, thereby preventing arcing at the sharp edges of the gate 160a. Although an arcing occurs within the FED, ions generated due to the arcing are collected by the focus gate electrode 190 and then grounded before the cathode 120 or the resistor layer 130 are attacked by the ions. As a result, an electrical short between the cathode 120 and an anode (not shown), as well as a physical damage thereof caused by arcing can be prevented.

An electron beam emitted by the micro-tip 150 can be focused by adjusting the thickness of the focus gate insulation layer 191, such that a small spot can be formed on the anode. In addition, a high-color purity can be achieved for color displays.

The opening of the focus gate insulation layer 191 is formed by reactive ion etching (RIE). In the formation of the opening, the RIE conditions are adjusted to appropriately vary the geometry of the micro-tip 150 exposed through the opening, i.e., to form the micro-tip 150 with nano-sized surface features. By doing so, the gate turn-on voltage can be lowered by more than 30V compared with a convention FED.

A preferred embodiment of a method for fabricating a FED according to the present invention will be described. Referring to FIG. 5, a cathode 120, a resistor layer 130, a gate insulation layer 140 with a well 140a, and a gate electrode 160 with a gate 160a are formed on a semiconductor wafer 100 in sequence by a conventional method, and then a micro-tip 150 is formed in the well 140a on the resistor layer 130.

Referring to FIG. 6, polyimide is deposited to have a predetermined thickness over the stack by spin coating, thereby forming a focus gate insulation layer 191.

Following this, a focus gate electrode 190 is formed over the focus gate insulation layer 191. The focus gate insulation layer 191 is formed by spin coating, soft baking and then curing, and the thickness of the focus gate insulation layer 191 ranges from 3 to 150 μm. This range of the thickness will be described in detail below.

Then, a focus gate 109a or 190b is formed in the focus gate electrode 190 by photolithography. Referring to FIGS. 7A and 7B, a predetermined photoresist pattern 200a or 200b is formed on the focus gate electrode 190, and portions of the focus gate electrode 190 which are exposed through the photoresist pattern 200a or 100b are etched by a general dry or wet etching method using the photoresist pattern 200a or 200b as an etch mask, thereby resulting in the focus gate 190a or 190b in the focus gate electrode 190. FIG. 7A illustrates a configuration in which a plurality of micro-tips 160 are exposed through the same single focus gate 190a, and FIG. 7B illustrates a configuration in which just one micro-tip 150 is exposed through a single respective focus gate 190a. The thickness of the focus gate insulation layer 191 is in the range of 3-150 μm for the configuration of FIG. 7A, and of 6-50 μm for the configuration of FIG. 7B. In particular, when each gate 160a is exposed through a single respective focus gate 190a, the thickness of the focus gate insulation layer 191 may be in the range of 3-10 μm. Alternatively, when 2-4 gates 160a are exposed through the same single focus gate 190a, the thickness of the focus gate insulation layer 191 may be in the range of 6-50 μm. When a single focus gate 190a corresponds to one pixel or dot defined by a cross-overlapped portion between the gate electrode and the cathode, the thickness of the focus gate insulation layer 191 may be in the range of 10-150 μm.

Once the formation of the focus gate 190a or 190b is completed, the photoresist pattern 200a or 200 is stripped, and the underlying focus gate insulation layer 191 is etched using the focus electrode pattern 190′ as an etch mask. The focus gate insulation layer 191 may be etched by dry etching such as RIE or plasma etching. When a plasma etching method is applied, a gas mixture containing O_2 as a major component, and a fluorine-based gas such as CF_4, SF_6 or CHF_3 may be used as a reaction gas. The gas mixture may be CF_4/O_2, SF_6/O_2, CHF_3/O_2, $CF_4/SF_6/O_2$, $CF_4/CHF_3/O_2$, or $SF_6/CHF_3/O_2$. Alternatively, a gas mixture of O_2 and a chlorine-

based gas, for example, Cl_2/O_2, CCl_4/O_2, or $Cl_2/CCl_4/O_2$, can be used as a reaction gas.

Reportedly, polyimide layers are etched into a grass-like structure by dry plasma etching using O_2. The glass-like structure describes rough surface features of the resulting structure due to different etch rates over regions of the polyimide layer. The addition of O_2 to the fluorine-based gas is for increasing the etch rate of the polyimide focus gate insulation layer 191, such that the micro-tip 150 below the focus gate insulation layer 191 can be etched by plasma. The etch rate of the micro-tip 150 by plasma can be adjusted by varying the O_2-to-fluorine- or chlorine-based gas ratio in a reaction gas used, plasma pressure, and plasma power in plasma etching the focus gate insulation layer 191. Since the focus gate insulation layer 191 formed of a carbonaceous polymer such as polyimide or photoresist is etched into a grass-like structure, the polyimide or photoresist may randomly remain over the micro-tip 150. The polyimide or photoresist remaining on the micro-tip 150 acts as a mask for a further etching to the micro-tip 150. As the result of the etching, the micro-tip 150 with nano-sized surface features, as a collection of a large number of nano-tips, is formed.

FIG. 9 is a scanning electron microscope (SEM) photo showing the micro-tip, gate insulation layer, and gate electrode formed on the substrate, and FIG. 10 is a magnified view of the micro-tip of FIG. 9. As shown in FIGS. 9 and 10, the micro-tip as a collection of nano-tips has nano-sized surface feature, as described previously. As a test result, the gate turn-on voltage of the FED fabricated by the method according to the present invention is reduced by about 20V, and the working voltage (a voltage level at a 1/90 duty ratio and a 60Hz frequency) is lowered by about 40-50V, compared with a conventional FED. The height of the micro-tip and the size of the nano-tips can be varied by adjusting the etching ratios or etching rates of the focus gate insulation layer formed of a carbonaceous polymer, and the micro-tip during the plasma etching, as described previously. FIG. 11 is a SEM photo of the FED illustrating the sharp vertical sidewalls of an opening in the focus gate insulation layer. As a leakage test result, a resistance between the focus gate electrode and the gate electrode is higher than 10 MΩ.

As previously mentioned, in the FED and the FED fabrication according to the present invention, occurrence of arcing is suppressed. Although an arcing occurs in the FED, damage of the cathode and the resistor layer is prevented. Due to the minimized arcing effect, a higher working voltage can be applied to the anode, compared with a conventional FED. The micro-tips with nano-sized surface features contributes to increasing the emission current density of the FED increases, so that a high-brightness display can be achieved with the FED. The gate turn-on voltage can be lowered due to the micro-tip as a collection of nano-sized tips, thereby reducing power consumption.

According to the present invention, an electron beam emitted by the micro-tip can be focused on the anode through the focus gate of the focus gate electrode by varying a voltage level applied to the focus gate electrode. Even for a display with a considerably long substrate-to-faceplate distance, for example, longer than 3 mm, a high-resolution, and a high-color purity for color displays are ensured.

While this invention has been particularly shown and described with reference to preferred embodiments thereof, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various changes in form and details may be made to the described embodiments without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.